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JESUS' **FURROWED** BACK

God is "A"
Spirit?

REPENTED "At"
Jonah's Preaching?

**NEW BOOK
FOR TEENS:**
Defending Jesus

JESUS' FURROWED BACK

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Article In Brief...



The Bible's attribute of inspiration is proof positive of its divine origin. The Old Testament foreshadowed the earth-shaking events that eventually surrounded the earthly life and death of Jesus Christ. A thousand years in advance, the psalmist predicted that Jesus' back would be "plowed."

THE WONDER OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, **searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating** when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—**things which angels desire to look into....** [K]nowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, **for prophecy never came by the will of man**, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

THE nature of Hebrew prophecy was such that the prophets were superintended by the Holy Spirit in their utterances. To be sure, their own minds were engaged as they reported the truths God wanted conveyed, but the Scripture they wrote did not arise from their own thinking or opinions. They did not necessarily grasp the full significance of their messages—particularly as those utterances pertained to the Messianic age far distant from their own day. Hebrew professor A.B. Davidson noted this circumstance:

[T]here are...passages in the Old Testament where the writer does not seem to be consciously speaking of anything future, but of things and persons then existing; while the New Testament applies the passages to the Messiah, and affirms that they were spoken of Him, not merely that they are applicable to him.¹

Since the Holy Spirit superintended the writing, being eternal and omniscient, He would be aware of future

fulfillments and anticipations of which the human writer would not be aware. Hence, God could inspire and superintend a prophet—like Isaiah in 750 B.C.—to produce a prophecy that pertained largely to events contemporaneous with the prophet's own day and yet, simultaneously, have the prophet embed in his prophecy an allusion or allusions that are worded in such a way that they also anticipate an incident or event in the life of the Messiah while He was on Earth. These allusions often also fit into the context of the contemporaneous situation and convey immediate relevance and application. Yet their meaning also anticipates moments in the life of Christ.²

Take, as an example, Isaiah chapter six which consists of the call and commission of Isaiah by God to his prophetic role. God informs Isaiah that his missionary effort to cause Judah to repent would fail, and that God would "cut Judah down in judgment until only a tenth or remnant remains."³ Yet John could quote from verse 10 of the chapter and declare its fulfillment, along with Isaiah 53:1, as occurring nearly eight centuries later among those in the 1st century A.D. who refused to believe in Christ despite the miraculous signs He performed in their midst (John 12:38-40). So, while Isaiah received a message from God that was intended for the immediate 8th century B.C. audience of Isaiah, he also received bits of insights that pertained specifically and ultimately to the circumstances surrounding the Messiah's incarnation. Consequently, John declared: "These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him" (John 12:41).

There are some Old Testament prophecies that are very nearly, if not wholly, describing the Messianic era, with no immediate historical context in view (e.g., Psalm

2:2; 110:1; Isaiah 9:6; 53). There are other prophecies that have an immediate historical context, but which also anticipate future events associated with the Messianic era (e.g., 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Isaiah 7). These latter prophecies differ with each other in terms of what percentage of the prophecy has both the immediate and the future in view. Still other prophecies appear to be almost completely intended to refer to circumstances that the prophet is himself facing and the immediate audience is, therefore, himself or his contemporaries. Yet, even in such a prophecy, a single Messianic anticipation may be divinely deposited which fully accords with the immediate context while also predicting a single instance in the life of the coming Messiah. It is nothing for God to deliver a message to an audience in 1000 B.C. and have **every part of the message** to have immediate and pertinent meaning to the original audience, while simultaneously wording the message to have a meaning for a subsequent audience hundreds of years into the future. What's more, such anticipations may or may not be explained by later inspired writers, thereby leaving the student of the Scriptures to detect such long-term applications based on the tenor of Bible teaching, particularly as it relates to the culmination of the divine scheme of redemption in the New Testament.

Psalm 129:3

Psalm 129 appears to fit in this last category:

"Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth," Let Israel now say—"Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me. **The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.**"

The LORD is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked (129:1-4).



Interestingly, the original setting of this psalm cannot now be ascertained. As Barnes notes, "it is a psalm which would be applicable to many periods of the Jewish history."⁴ As a "song of ascents," Psalm 129 reassures the average Israelite that all the afflictions and persecutions heaped upon Israel by the wicked have been unable to terminate her national existence. Indeed, Israel's enemies will be thwarted by a righteous God. What, specifically, are these afflictions that have been inflicted on Israel? The psalmist pinpoints only one—a statement that is striking if not puzzling: "The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long" (vs. 3).

No doubt the psalmist's contemporaries would have taken this statement metaphorically, acknowledging that the history of Israel had been such that they had endured harsh treatment at the hands of enemies whose mistreatment could be likened to a plow gouging one's back. Yet, such a metaphor would seem to be a rather odd comparison. Barnes suggests: "the idea is that the sufferings which they had endured were such as would be well represented by a plough passing over a field, tearing up the sod; piercing deep; and producing long rows or furrows. The direct allusion would seem to be to stripes inflicted **on** the back, **as if** a plough had been made to pass over it."⁵ He then recalls the Egyptian bondage to which Israel had been subjected for so many years. But if the reference is strictly to a beating, why compare it to a plow that creates furrows? The lash can certainly inflict substantial damage to the back, but one would not typically conceive of that damage in terms of the deep furrows of a plowed field. And why speak of the furrows as "long"? Barnes gives the sense of "long" as pertaining to length of time, i.e., prolonging—since he felt

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“it is difficult to see in what sense it could be said that stripes inflicted on the back could be made long.”⁶

However, what if this allusion is, in fact, intended to be a Messianic anticipation?⁷ If we assume Psalm 129:3 is an allusion to Jesus, what could the statement possibly mean? In what sense or in what way could Jesus have had His back “plowed” resulting in “long furrows”? We must first turn to the New Testament for possible clarification. When we do so, examining specifically the four Gospel narratives concerning Christ’s sufferings leading to the cross, we find that one of His ordeals consisted of a Roman scourging. Here are the inspired writers’ remarks on the subject:

Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had **scourged** Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified (Matthew 27:26; NKJV margin: “flogged with a Roman scourge”).

So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had **scourged** Him, to be crucified (Mark 15:15).

So then Pilate took Jesus and **scourged** Him (John 19:1).

The underlying Greek term rendered “scourged” in the first two verses is *phragelloo* while the term used in the third verse is *mastigoo*—both verbs meaning “to scourge.”⁸ What, precisely, was a Roman “scourging”?

Roman Scourging

In their efforts to keep the peace, the Romans employed a cruel, barbaric instrument called a flagrum (diminutive: flagellum⁹). Among the various forms of whips, “the terrible *flagellum* [was] the severest of all.”¹⁰ This instrument was used as a form of punishment for criminals, typically as a prelude to crucifixion and capital punishment¹¹—“the brutal preliminary to the still more brutal death of the cross.”¹² Historical sources are generally uniform in

their depiction of the Roman flagrum. It consisted of a stout wooden handle to which were attached three or more leather thongs—sometimes plaited or braided—of variable length.¹³ Each strip of leather was impregnated and weighted with a variety of objects, attached intermittently at intervals along each thong, including small, jagged bits of bone, rough pieces of metal (iron, lead, or zinc), and even sheep bones (*astragals*).¹⁴ Sometimes balls of metal were attached that were “stuck full of small sharp points.”¹⁵ And sometimes the leather thongs were even “terminated by hooks.”¹⁶ The translators of the English Standard Version recognized these facts and inserted at both Matthew 27:26 and Mark 15:15 the following footnote for “scourged”: “A Roman judicial penalty, consisting of a severe beating with a multi-lashed whip containing imbedded pieces of bone and metal.”

The physical trauma inflicted on the human body by this devilish device is reflected in the third of Horace’s *Satires*—“the horrible scourge.”¹⁷ Similarly, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written in the early fourth century, historian Eusebius of Caesarea described the scourging of second century Christian martyrs in Smyrna in these words: “the bystanders were struck with amaze-

ment when they saw them lacerated with scourges even to the innermost veins and arteries, so that the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members, were exposed to view.”¹⁸ In their celebrated article on the death of Christ which appeared in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, William Edwards, et al. described the impact: “the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.”¹⁹ In his forensic inquiry into the crucifixion of Christ, Zugibe explained: “The bits of metal would dig deep into the flesh, ripping small blood vessels, nerves, muscle, and skin.... [resulting in] lacerations (tears) [and] puncture marks made by the weights or scorpions [as well as] lacerations with bleeding into the chest cavity.”²⁰

We must not miss the abhorrent, frightful reality of this nightmarish form of Roman punishment. The usual flogging or whipping, which has characterized many cultures throughout human history, inflicted wounds on the recipient consisting of bruises, whelps, and surface tearing or even stripping of the skin. In stark contrast, the flagrum inflicted far greater damage to the back. As Nicolotti observed, compared to the lash (*scutica*), “the scourge caused deeper wounds and could even lacerate the flesh.... [I]t produced deep wounds.”²¹ Referring to the flagellum in his *A Dictionary of Roman and Greek Antiquities*, Anthony Rich notes that “the nature of the wound produced by it is always specified by words which are descriptive of **cutting**, such as *caedertre*, *secare*, *scindere*.”²² Scholars repeatedly used the term “lacerate” to describe the wounds created by the flagrum.²³ *Appleton’s Medical*



Credit Image:
Thomas Tarpley

Dictionary defines “lacerate” as “having the margin **deeply cut** into irregular segments as if torn,” and “lacerated” as “**cleft** irregularly, as if torn,” and “laceration” as “a breach made by tearing.”²⁴ *Collins Dictionary* states: “If something lacerates your skin, it **cuts** it badly and **deeply**.”²⁵ *Macmillan Dictionary* has: “to make a **deep cut** in someone’s flesh.”²⁶

In view of these graphic depictions and descriptions of a Roman scourging, it is surely not without significance that the Hebrew term used by the psalmist to describe the injuries inflicted on the back of the first-person speaker bears a meaning that strongly resembles those descriptions. Brown, Driver, and Briggs define the term rendered “plowed” as “vb. cut in, engrave, plough, devise,” connecting the term “engrave” with a “worker in metals.”²⁷ Koehler, Baumgartner, et al. give the same two basic meanings of “to plough” and “to engrave on.”²⁸ A sample instance of the latter meaning is seen in Jeremiah 17:1—“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with the point of a diamond it is **engraved** on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars.” Observe the two meanings are closely aligned, since the act of engraving on metal and the act of ploughing a field are the same, i.e., the object on which the action is performed in both cases receives a “cut” or “laceration,” creating essentially a lengthy groove or rut. Pierre Barbet uses the expression “long oblique furrows.”²⁹ “Oblique” is defined as “having a slanting or sloping direction, course, or position.”³⁰ Incredibly, the ancient descriptions of the Roman scourging’s horrific carnage inflicted on the back of its victims match the simple declaration of the psalmist: “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.”

Isaiah’s Allusions

Observe how this psalm bears a striking resemblance to Isaiah 53 in which the “man of sorrows” is despised and afflicted—but the outcome is positive. Significantly, the Messianic prophet Isaiah made two references to the passion of Christ as it relates to Christ’s “back.” The first comes in chapter 50 in which the Messiah declares: “**I gave My back to those who struck Me**, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (50:6). The second appears in the famous “Suffering Servant” prophecy: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by **His stripes** we are healed” (53:5). As a marginal note for the term “stripes,” the NKJV has “blows that cut in.” The NASB has “and by His **scourging** we are healed.” The Orthodox Jewish Bible has in brackets “stripes, lacerations.” The Wycliffe Bible has “by his scourgings.”

SUMMARY

Here we have another mystery hidden in the Divine Mind from all eternity. One cannot help but feel a sense of wonder concerning the incredible Old Testament foreshadowing of the earth-shaking events surrounding the earthly life and death of Jesus Christ—“who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose **stripes** you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).³¹

ENDNOTES

¹ A.B. Davidson (1903), *Old Testament Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark), pp. 335-336.

² Bible scholars have for centuries bandied about the question of how to describe and categorize the various ways in which Old Testament prophecy functions. For example, Andres Fernandez coined the expression *sensus plenior*—the “fuller sense”—which refers to the additional or deeper meaning of a passage intended by God but not clearly recognized by the human author who recorded the original passage. See Raymond Brown (1955), *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock); John Donahue, ed. (2005), *Life in Abundance*

(cont. on p. 140)

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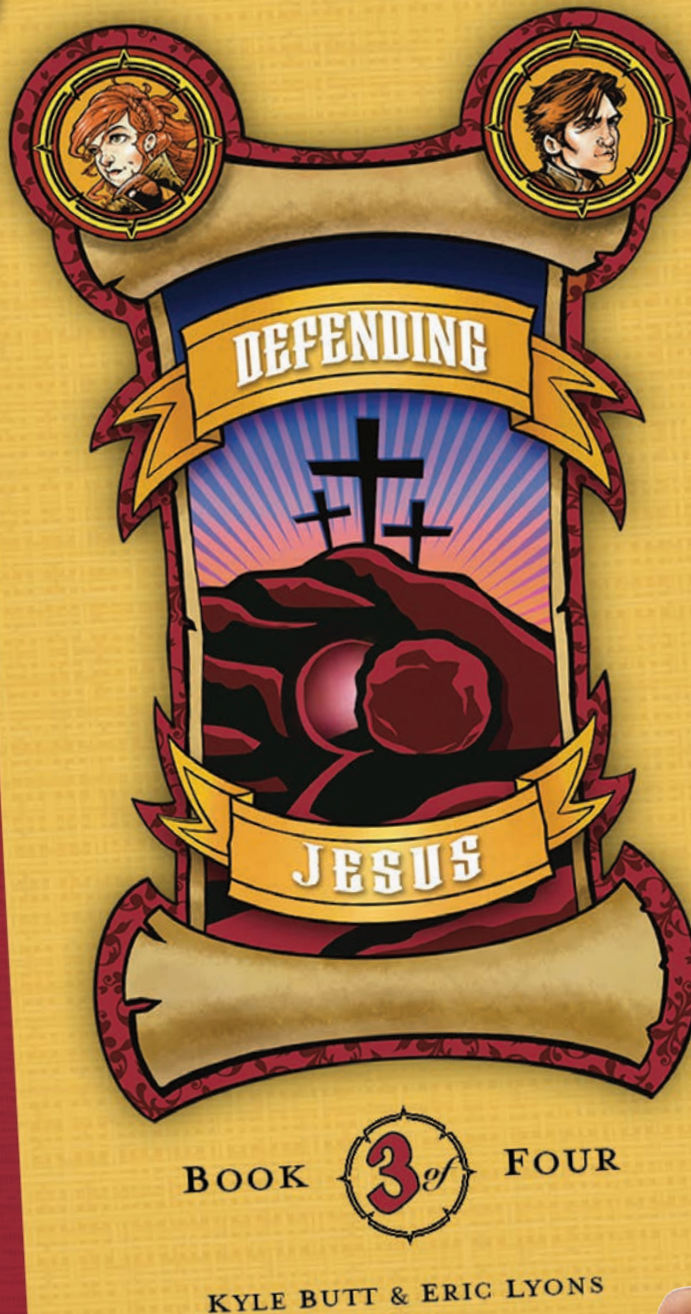
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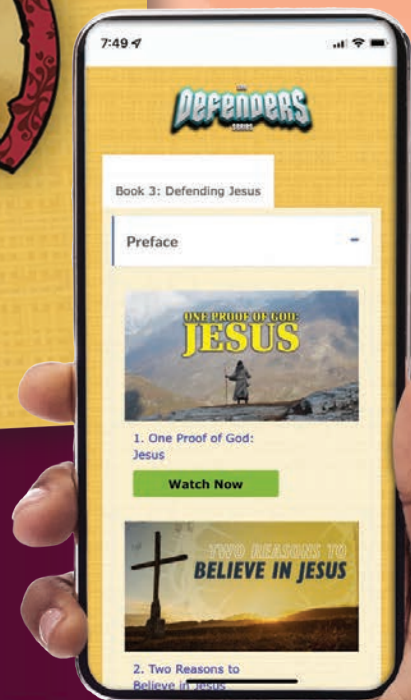


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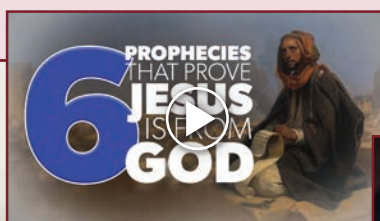


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(Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), pp. 207ff.; “What Does the Term “sensus plenior” Mean? (2008), Monergism, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/qna/plenior.html>. Not referring specifically to this expression, Davidson nevertheless offered a similar description of this Old Testament phenomenon: “we may say quite fairly that the meaning or reference in the mind of the Spirit of Revelation was different from that of the Hebrew writer. To the one the whole was in view, the end was seen in the beginning, and the line, longer or shorter, of intermediate development, through which the beginning should rise into the perfect end, was visible in all its extent; while the view of the other was necessarily limited, and though he always spoke or wrote intelligently, and with an earnestness never surpassed by any teacher or moralist in other lands, yet his conception of the truth which he was teaching must have been coloured by the relations amidst which he stood, and by the nature of his own mind” (pp. 327-328). See also Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (1982), *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books), pp. 164-167; Neale Pryor (1986), “Use of the Old Testament in the New” in *Biblical Interpretation*, ed. F. Furman Kearley, Edward Myers, and Timothy Hadley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), pp. 276ff.

³ Frank Chesser (2016), *The Heart of Isaiah* (Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs), pp. 34-35.

⁴ Albert Barnes (2005 reprint), *Psalms: Notes on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 255.

⁵ p. 256, emp. in original. Other commentators treat the allusion similarly. E.g., Joseph Alexander (1975 reprint), *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), pp. 519-520; H.C. Leupold (1969 reprint), *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 900.

⁶ Ibid. A flagrum would wrap around the rib cage and be dragged across the torso around to the back.

⁷ In his comments on Psalm 129, Charles Spurgeon connected the plowing described as inflicted on Christ’s church in the wake of Jesus’ own sufferings: “The true church has in every age had fellowship with **her Lord under his cruel flagellations: his sufferings** were a prophecy of what she would be called hereafter to endure.” It is interesting that

he linked the furrowing of the psalm with Jesus’ flagellations—(1978 reprint), *The Treasury of David* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 7:56.

- ⁸ “In NT, however, *mastigoo* is a synonym for *phragelloo*”—J.C. Lambert (1908), “Scourge, Scourging,” *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark), 2:581.
- ⁹ “Flagellum,” *Collins English Dictionary*, <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/flagellum>; “Flagellum,” *Oxford Dictionaries*, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/flagellum; John Ayto (2005), “Flail” in *Word Origins* (London: A.&C. Black Publishers), second edition, https://books.google.com/books?id=hsRISNLSSHAC&pg=PT384&lpg=PT384&dq=Latin:+flagrum;+diminutive:+flagellum&source=bl&ots=d3C44_TwJC&sig=ACfU3U3dp2GJhqj5rMjMaaMs mgK36N34JQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjvOuV54HoAhUDSa0KHUVVAS8Q6AEwEXoECAwQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false; William Smith, et al. (1901), *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: John Murray), p. 864.
- ¹⁰ William Cooper (1869), *A History of the Rod in all Countries from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London: John Hotten), p. 34.
- ¹¹ Charles Anthon (1843), *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (New York: Harper & Brothers), p. 445; Henry Dosker (1915), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Co.), 4:2704.
- ¹² Lambert, 2:581. Also, Frederick Zugibe (2005), *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry* (New York: M. Evans), p. 19—“the usual procedure among the Romans prior to crucifixion.” “In many cases it was itself fatal”—Carl Schneider (1967), “*mastigoo*, *mastidzo*, *mastix*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4:517.
- ¹³ Lambert, 2:582; Henry Dosker (1915), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Co.), 4:2704; William Edwards, Wesley Gabel, and Floyd Hosmer (1986), *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 256, March 21; Cooper, p. 34.
- ¹⁴ Alexander Adam (1819), *Roman Antiquities or an Account of the Manners and Customs of the Romans*, rev. P. Wilson

(New York: William Mercein), p. 529; Smith, p. 864; Dosker, 4:2704; Zugibe, p. 19.

- ¹⁵ Cooper, p. 35.
- ¹⁶ Anthon, p. 445. See also Philip Shaft and Henry Wace, eds. (1892), “The Ecclesiastical History, Dialogues, and Letters of Theodore” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, trans. Blomfield Jackson (New York: The Christian Literature Co.), 3:124.
- ¹⁷ Horace (1883), *The Works of Horace Rendered into English Prose*, trans. James Lonsdale and Samuel Lee (London: Macmillan), I.3 (p. 113). Horace, who was the leading Roman lyric poet during the time of Caesar Augustus, died in 8 B.C.
- ¹⁸ Eusebius (312-324), *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book 4, Chapter 15, Paragraph 4, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.ix.xv.html#fna_iii.ix.xv-p3.2.
- ¹⁹ William Edwards, Wesley Gabel, and Floyd Hosmer (1986), “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 256[11]:1455-1463, March 21, p. 1457.
- ²⁰ pp. 20-22.
- ²¹ Andrea Nicolotti (2018), “What Do We Know About the Scourging of Jesus?” *The Ancient Near East Today*, 6[12], December, <http://www.asor.org/anetoday/2018/12/What-Do-We-Know-About-Scourging-Jesus>.
- ²² Anthony Rich (1881), *A Dictionary of Roman and Greek Antiquities* (New York: D. Appleton), p. 288, emp. added.
- ²³ E.g., D.D. Whedon (1874), *A Popular Commentary on the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 333.
- ²⁴ Smith Jelliffe, ed. (1915), *Appleton’s Medical Dictionary* (New York: D. Appleton & Co.), p. 474.
- ²⁵ “Lacerate,” *Collins English Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/lacerate>.
- ²⁶ “Lacerate,” *Macmillan Dictionary*, <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/lacerate>.
- ²⁷ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs (2004 reprint), *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson), p. 360.
- ²⁸ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson, & J.J. Stamm (1994–2000), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, electronic edition), pp. 357-358.
- ²⁹ Pierre Barbet (1963), *A Doctor at Calvary* (Garden City, NY: Image Books), p. 92.
- ³⁰ “Oblique,” *The American Heritage Dic-*

tionary, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=oblique>.

³¹ The author is fully cognizant of the fact that no New Testament passage identifies Psalm 129:3 as a Messianic prophecy, nor is he contending that we can know for certain that such is the case. We know the Old Testament contains a **great deal** of foreshadowing of the coming Messiah, and that Jesus, Himself, declared that the Old Testament is riddled with it: "And beginning at Moses and **all** the Prophets, He expounded to them in **all the Scriptures** the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). One cannot help but wonder how much more foreshadowing exists in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit did not choose to divulge in the New Testament. For example, the wording of Isaiah 62:1-2 is such that it is difficult not to see in it the grand two-phase culmination of the divine scheme of redemption with, first, the conversion of the first Jewish Christians on Pentecost in A.D. 30 (Acts 2) and, second, the conversion some years later of the first Gentile Christians (Acts 10), followed immediately by the divine bestowal of the name "Christian." Yet, the New Testament does not explicitly allude to Isaiah 62 in the fruition of these earth-shaking events. One is reminded of the admonition of the Angel of the Lord to the high priest in Zechariah's day: "Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are **men symbolic of things to come**." In any case, the author recognizes the need to show caution in drawing a firm conclusion regarding the possible Messianic import of Psalm 129:3. It is offered to the reader solely as a possibility. James Bales offered this guiding principle that reassures the author on the matter: "[H]ow shall we interpret those prophecies of the Old Testament, which pertain to the Messiah and his reign, which are not interpreted in the New Testament? These must be interpreted **so as to harmonize with New Testament teaching**"—(1971), *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. W.B. West, Bill Flatt, and Thomas Warren (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate), p. 120, *emp. added*. Indeed, for 2,000 years men have been mining the treasures of Old Testament prophecy, digging ever deeper, in a feeble effort to uncover the unfathomable depths of inspired writ.



THE process of translating from one language to another is an arduous undertaking that entails consideration of a wide variety of linguistic issues. It is very often the case that the "receptor language" may not have a single word that corresponds to a word in the "parent language." Hence, translators may include additional words in order to convey the meaning of the original—words which they may (or may not) place in italics. Italicized words are intended to flag for the English reader the fact that the translators added the words in hopes of making the meaning of the original accessible.¹ Most of the time, translators do well in their attempts to translate accurately and use italics effectively. However, on occasion their decisions can hamper comprehension.

In addition to inserting italicized words, English translations also contain words that were inserted by translators **without** being italicized. Again, perhaps most of the time, their decisions are well-intentioned and helpful. At other times, however, they can mislead the English reader. One such example is seen in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Among His remarks to her was the declaration that "God is Spirit, and those who

worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Some translations insert the article "a" before "spirit." This erroneous insertion of the indefinite article is unwarranted. Most English translations recognize this fact and render it accordingly.²

"God is spirit" is equivalent to comparable biblical constructions, including "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In each case, we are being informed about the very **nature and essence** of God—not His personality.³ "Spirit," "light," and "love" are attributes of God. They are characteristics or qualities of His being. We humans possess a spirit and a physical body; but God **is** spirit. He is non-corporeal. Jesus said, "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). Though in the eternal realm, "we will be like Him" and "we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2), nevertheless, His being will most surely far surpass and transcend our spiritual, heavenly bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44,49).

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and essence of God.*

The depiction of the nature and character of God in the Bible is unlike any other representation of deity by humans throughout history. The God of the Bible is not **physical**,⁴ but rather transcends the physical. As the Creator, He brought into being all that is physical when He created the Universe. Humans are created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27)—which refers to **spiritual** aspects of the divine nature. Our physical bodies are not created in His image, since He is non-physical. For Jesus to leave the spiritual realm to come to the Earth to die a physical death and shed physical blood on our behalf, a physical body had to be “prepared” (Hebrews 10:5) for Him to inhabit temporarily.

A host of descriptions of the spiritual nature of deity may be found in the Bible—though human limitations can hamper our comprehension and our ability to conceptualize fully the divine nature. In closing, consider these two:

Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You” (Nehemiah 9:5-6).

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape

if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:22-29).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For more on this thorny subject, see Jack Lewis (1991), *Questions You’ve Asked About Bible Translations* (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications), pp. 141-171; Walter Specht (1968), “The Use of Italics in English Versions of the New Testament,” *Andrews University Studies*, 6:88-109, January; John Eadie (1876), *The English Bible* (London: Macmillan), 2:180-285; William Wonderly (1956), “What About Italics?” *Bible Transla-*

tor, 7:114-116, July; F.H.A. Scrivener (1884), “On the Use of the Italic Type by the Translators, and on the Extension of their Principles by Subsequent Editors,” in *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible (1611)* (Cambridge: University Press), pp. 61-81.

- ² English translations that include “a” are the ASV, AMPC, BRG, DARBY, DRA, GNV, GW, JUB, KJV, NOG, NMB, TPT, RGT, WYC, and YLC. Those that omit “a” are the AMP, CSB, CEB, CJB, CEV, DLNT, ERV, EHV, ESV, EXB, GNT, HCSB, ICB, ISV, PHILLIPS, LEB, TLB, MSG, MEV, MOUNCE, NABRE, NASB, NCV, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLV, NLT, NRSV, NTE, OJB, RSV, TLV, VOICE, and WEB.

- ³ Henry Alford (1980 reprint), *Alford’s Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 1:732.

- ⁴ It is true that the Holy Spirit utilized anthropomorphisms to accommodate Himself to the finite human mind. But the Bible is consistent in its representation of deity as a non-physical, spiritual Being Whose eternal nature preceded the creation of physical matter. God created time, matter, and space—but He Himself exists outside of time and space.



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that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." Observe that their post-repentance activities are stylized "works" and that these extensive enactments were evidence of their repentance. Hence, they "repented **into** the preaching of Jonah." Having been convinced by Jonah's preaching to the point that they changed their thinking (i.e., repented), they then coupled their repentance with genuine compliance with the demands that Jonah laid before them. They repented into that state or condition demanded by Jonah's preaching.¹ A so-called "causal *eis*" does not exist.²

IN an effort to avoid the force of Acts 2:38 as it pertains to the essentiality of baptism as a perquisite to remission of sin, some polemicists have set forth the argument that the Greek preposition *eis* can have a "causal" meaning. Hence, they insist that baptism is "because of" remission of sins, i.e., one is baptized because he is already saved, rather than baptized "in order" to receive salvation. As an example, they allude to Matthew chapter 12 where Jesus responded to the hardhearted scribes and Pharisees when they disingenuously asked for Him to perform a sign. Included in His response were these words: "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented **at** the preaching of Jonah; and indeed, a greater than Jonah is here" (vs. 41). The English word "at" in this verse is a translation of the Greek preposition *eis*. On this basis, defenders of the "causal" meaning allege that this verse constitutes an instance of a "causal" *eis*. They ask: "Did the Ninevites repent **in order** to get Jonah to preach, or did they repent **because of** Jonah's preaching?"

Jonah preached a succinct, simple, but demanding, message to pagan

Gentiles. What was the result? Did they offer mere oral platitudes that paid lip service to religion—like the scribes and Pharisees? No, they truly repented. But, apart from Jesus informing us of their repentance, how do we know they repented, seeing that the Bible terms for repentance are not used in the Jonah account to describe their response? Because we are informed what, precisely, they **did** after hearing Jonah's preaching: they proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth, the king covered himself in sackcloth, sat in ashes, and sent forth a decree to all the Ninevites requiring abstinence from food and drink, and made loud entreaties to God (Jonah 3:5-9). Jonah 3:10 summarizes: "Then God saw their **works**, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster

Their post-repentance activities are stylized "works," and these extensive enactments were evidence of their repentance.

Repent



ENDNOTES

¹ Jesus' statement also constitutes an instance of the figure of speech known as "Metonymy of the Cause," in which the cause or instrument is put for the thing effected by it. In this case, "preaching" was the instrument that Jesus mentioned, but what He was orally highlighting was the **effect** of Jonah's preaching. For a discussion of this figure of speech, see E.W. Bullinger (1898), *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968 reprint), pp. 545ff.

² For a discussion of the alleged "causal *eis*," see Dave Miller (2019), *Baptism and the Greek Made Simple* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 39ff.



NOTE FROM *The Editor*



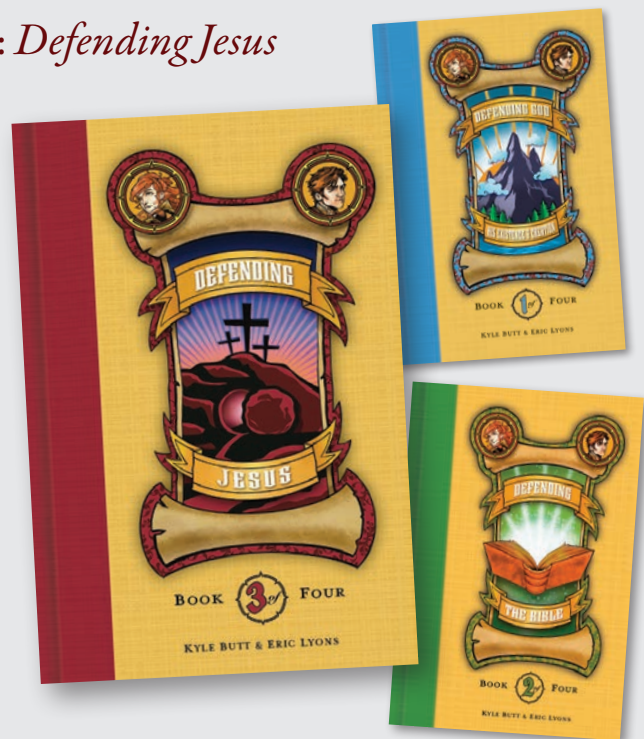
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